



Staff Report

CONSIDERATION OF A LIGHTED HOLIDAY TREE IN TWIN PINES PARK

Honorable Mayor and Council Members:

Summary

The Parks and Recreation Department was asked to provide a recommendation to the City Council to determine what costs would be associated with lighting one of the trees in Twin Pines Park as a way of marking the Holiday season, and to suggest which tree would be best for this purpose.

After examining the options, staff recommends contracting with a vendor for decorating the large Redwood tree across from City Hall adjacent to the Ralston Avenue entrance. A preliminary estimate of the cost for decorating this tree with lights is in the range of \$15,000 with an annual maintenance fee of \$3,000.

Background

Preliminary research by staff determined that there are two general types of companies that decorate large, outdoor trees with lights:

- Tree companies. These companies have the equipment (aerial lifts) and staff with experience working with trees. Some of them have experience installing strands of lights in large trees, but that is the extent of their participation – they do not provide the lights, test them, connect them to power, or provide service and maintenance after installation.
- Lighting companies. These companies generally do provide the lights, test them, connect them to power, and provide service and maintenance after initial installation.

Staff contacted companies of both types to find the estimated costs that appear later in the report.

Having a nearby source of power for the lights will be the responsibility of the City when dealing with either company. The types of lights recommended for use with large outdoor trees are designated in the industry as C-7 (approx. 2” long) or C-9 (approx. 3” long). These lights are much brighter than the mini-lights that one might be familiar with from home use, and so are much better suited for large trees. They are available in several holiday colors, but clear lights are often recommended as the tree can then be lit for other, non-holiday occasions where clear

lights may be more appropriate. They are also outdoor-only lights, and withstand exposure to the elements much better. They do, however, require greater power to operate. In general, anywhere from 3-8 20-amp circuits would be required to power the lights, depending on the size of the tree and the number of bulbs to be lit.

Discussion

As with real estate, a primary factor in determining the best tree to serve as the Holiday Tree is “location, location, location”. Ideally, the tree is easily accessible, both for people viewing the tree and for the workers and their equipment when installing the lights. As an “official” tree for the Belmont community, it would also be very desirable to have the tree placed near a prominent civic location, such as City Hall.

Another factor, and again one shared with the world of real estate, is size. The bigger the tree the more lights that it can hold, and the more effective it will be. However, as size increases so do the costs associated with installation, operation, and maintenance of the lights on the tree.

One last factor also needs to be addressed – is there a nearby source of power for the lights. If there is not, then additional costs will be involved to get power to the location of the Holiday Tree.

After looking over various possible trees in the Park, the following areas stand out as the best possibilities:

1. Large Redwood Tree. This large tree, approx. 90’ high, is the one visible from the steps of City Hall (and from the Council Chambers.) It is one of the most impressive trees in the park, due both to its size and its placement on the border of Twin Pines Park with Ralston Avenue. In terms of impact on people looking at the tree, this would be the most effective. However, the size of the tree does make it more difficult to decorate with lights, which will in turn increase the cost of decorating it. There is also no convenient source of power near this area, which will require the City providing power there for the lights.
2. Tree In The Parking Area Between Old Police Building And City Hall. While not as impressive as the large tree above, the tree here is far from small, and can also be seen from City Hall (though as it is off to the side, it is not as noticeable.) The location is not as nice as for the tree above, as it is in the middle of a parking area, and the tree is not really visible until you enter the parking area for City Hall. It does have easier access for workers when stringing lights, and being smaller will require less lights overall, reducing costs. Power can likely be supplied from the pole light near the tree.
3. Smaller Redwoods/Bushes Surrounding City Hall. Closer to City Hall than the other options, the small size of the trees makes this a less expensive option. With trees of this size, mini-lights could be used, and power for this area should be available from City Hall. This area does not have a single tree that stands out, so to make much impact all of

the trees/bushes in the area would be lit.

WHO TO PERFORM WORK?

Staff received estimates from two companies:

TAG Associates is headquartered in Los Gatos, and does holiday lights and decorations for many communities and commercial clients in the Bay Area, including San Carlos, Redwood City and Palo Alto. They provided the following cost estimates:

- A. Large Tree. Estimated cost of \$15,000 for all installation, testing, and connection of the lights. Ongoing maintenance costs of approximately \$3,000 per year.
- B. Tree in Parking Area. Estimated cost of \$6,000 for all installation, testing, and connection of the lights. Ongoing maintenance costs estimated to be \$900 per year.
- C. Trees/Bushes. Estimated costs of \$200 per tree/bush, using mini-lights. Trees can be decorated using ladders rather than lifts. Probable maintenance costs of \$40 per tree.

Davey Tree Experts is a company that the City often contracts with for trimming, removal, and upkeep. They have installed holiday trees for many customers throughout the Bay Area, and provided estimates for the first two options:

- A. Large Tree. Estimated Cost of \$1,000 to string the lights. Purchasing, testing, hooking the lights up to power, and ongoing maintenance would be the responsibility of the City.
- B. Tree in Parking Area. Estimated Cost of \$480 to string the lights. Purchasing, testing, hooking the lights up to power, and ongoing maintenance would be the responsibility of the City.

In addition to these costs, the City would need to purchase lights for the tree, at an estimated additional cost of \$500 plus tax and shipping costs.

Fiscal Impact

Actual costs will depend on final contract reached after receiving Council direction on which tree option to pursue, and on final negotiation of a contract with the vendor. If the recommendation of staff is approved, initial cost would be approximately \$15,000, with annual maintenance costs of approximately \$3,000 per year. There is no identified funding for this proposal in the Parks or Redevelopment budget. Therefore, funding for this action is recommended from Council's \$50,000 Contingency for unanticipated expenditures. If approved, this action will direct staff to bring back a supplemental appropriation for adoption at the Mid Year Budget Review.

Recommendation

Authorize staff to negotiate a contract with Davey Tree or TAG Associates, whichever is less, not to exceed \$15,000. The vendor will be required to install lights on the large Redwood tree

adjacent to the Ralston Avenue entrance.

Alternatives

1. Contract with Davey Tree Experts to install lights provided by the City on the Large Redwood Tree adjacent to the Ralston Avenue entrance across from City Hall.
2. Contract with TAG Associates to provide and install lights on the smaller tree between the old police building and City Hall.
3. Contract with Davey Tree Experts to install lights provided by the City on the smaller tree between the old police building and City Hall.
4. Contract with TAG Associates to provide and install mini-lights on the small redwoods and bushes immediately outside of City Hall.
5. Do not install any lights at this time, foregoing a Holiday Tree this year.

Attachments

None

Respectfully submitted,

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